

Message Text

PAGE 01 DACCA 00691 090946Z

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9650

INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

CINCPAC

CONFIDENTIAL DACCA 0691

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, BG

SUBJECT: INDO-BANGALEE RELATIONS: NEW FOCUS ON WATER PROBLEMS

1. COMMODORE KHAN, DEPUTY CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR, TOLD ME AT DINNER SATURDAY NIGHT THAT BANGLADESH'S NEW WATER PROBLEMS WITH INDIA OVER THE FARAKKA BARRAGE MAY BECOME AS SERIOUS, OR EVEN MORE SERIOUS, THAN THE BORDER HARASSMENT. HE SAID THAT INDIA HAD BEGUN AT THE END OF THE YEAR TO TAKE 40,000 CUSECS, THAT THIS FIGURE HAD BEEN CONFIRMED BY AN INDIAN SPEAKER IN THE LOK SABHA, AND THAT THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ALREADY WAS THAT THE GANGES IN BANGLADESH WAS SIX FEET LOWER THAN THE NORMAL AVERAGE BASED ON THE RECORDS OF THE PAST THIRTY YEARS. HE SAID THE INDIAN ACTION THREATENED DAMAGE TO THE BORO CROP AS THE FIRST EFFECT WOULD BE TO HARM THE USERS OF SHALLOW TUBE WELLS. NAVIGATION WOULD ALSO BE IMPAIRED ON SOME STRETCHES OF RIVER AND EVENTUALLY THERE WOULD BE A SERIOUS SALINITY PROBLEM, HE SAID.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 DACCA 00691 090946Z

2. COMMODORE KHAN SAID IRONICALLY THAT SOME INDIANS WERE CONTENDING THAT THEY ACTUALLY NEEDED 60,000 CUSECS, SO THAT THEIR ACTION IN TAKING ONLY 40,000 WAS OSTENSIBLY GENEROUS. HE SAID THAT THE INCREASED INDIAN TAKE WAS

NOT ENTIRELY JUSTIFIED BY THE NEED TO FLUSH THE ROOGHLY AND THAT THE PRIMARY BENEFICIARIES WERE ACTUALLY THE INDIAN FARMERS IN WEST BENGAL. HE ALLEGED THAT THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE FARAKKA BARRAGE AT ITS PARTICULAR SITE HAD MADE NO SENSE FROM THE BEGINNING EXCEPT IN TERMS OF CONTROLLING THE FLOW INTO THIS COUNTRY. HE SAID THEY HAD SENT TWO NOTES RECENTLY TO THE INDIANS ABOUT THIS URGENT MATTER BUT HAD RECEIVED NO REPLIES AS YET. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT LAST YEAR'S INTERIM AGREEMENT ON SHARING THE WATERS HAD NOT BEEN RENEWED AND THAT THERE MIGHT THUS BE SOME QUESTION ABOUT THE LEGAL BASIS FOR BANGLADESH'S CLAIM, BUT ABSOLUTELY NONE, HE SAID, ABOUT ITS MORAL RIGHT.

3. COINCIDENTALLY, POLITICAL COUNSELOR WAS TOLD TODAY BY CONFIDANT OF B.M. ABBAS, BANGALDESH'S CHIEF TECHNICAL PARTICIPANT IN THE SEVERAL FARAKKA BARRAGE NEGOTIATIONS, THAT MEETING OF PRESIDENT'S CONCIL OF ADVISORS EARLIER ON SATURDAY EVENING (AT WHICH ABBAS WAS PRESENT) HAD SEEN GENERAL ZIAUR RAHMAN TAKE A VERY HARD LINE AGAINST INDIA ON THIS ISSUE, AND THAT ZIA HAD BEEN JOINED BY MANY OTHERS IN STRESSING POINT THAT LOSS OF GANGA WATERS IS A LIFE-AND-DEATH ISSUE, GIVEN THE LOSS OF FOOD PRODUCTION WHICH CONTINUED LARGE-SCALE DIVERSION WILL CAUSE.

4. COMMENT: THE DACCA PRESS HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO MAKE AN ISSUE OF INDIA'S INCREASED DIVERSION OF WATER (DACCA 0606) BUT THIS IS THE STRONGEST EXPRESSION OF OFFICIAL CONCERN

THAT WE HAVE HEARD. IT ALSO REFLECTS THE RIGIDIFYING ANTI-INDIAN ATTITUDES CHARACTERISTIC OF THE OFFICIALS OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, AND IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT COMMODORE KHAN'S REMARKS TO ME WERE MADE IN THE PRESENCE OF A DACCA PUBLISHER (ITTEFAQ) AND A DACCA BUSINESSMAN, BOTH OF WHOM APPEARED TO SHARE THE COMMODORE'S CONCERN AND BIASES. THE WATER ISSUE MAY INDEED, AS COMMODORE KKAH ASSERTS, BECOME AS CRITICAL ISSUE AS THE BORDER HARASSMENT.

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 DACCA 00691 090946Z

THERE MAY BE SOME CONFUSION HERE ABOUT WHAT IS ACTUALLY GOING ON AT THE BORDER, WITH THE FLURRY OF CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS, BUT AN ACTUAL DROP IN THE WATER LEVELS IN BANGLADESH WILL BE TANGIBLE AND WILL AFFECT IMMEASURABLY MORE PEOPLE, IF IT IS SERIOUS ENOUGH, THAN THE ALLEGED BORDER RAIDS.

BOSTER

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<< END OF DOCUMENT >>

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